



Archbishop of Montréal

Pastoral Letter

BEARING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

September 13, 2023

Dear People of God in Montreal,

To believe in Jesus Christ is to encounter Jesus Christ. The mystery of faith is the mystery of both a personal and communal encounter with Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, true God and true man, crucified and risen. To encounter Jesus Christ is to discover the infinite Love of God, fully revealed on the Cross, in the pierced heart from which flowed blood and water (John 19:34).

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross is the splendour of Divine Love overcoming sin, suffering and death. As we contemplate Jesus Christ crucified, we enter into the mystery of his love for the eternal Father and his love for us, for humanity, for every human being at any place and any time. The image of the cross, in its vertical sense, unites heaven and earth, reconciling earth with heaven, and thus opening the way for an encounter between humankind and God. In its horizontal breadth, the cross embraces all of humanity, thus opening channels of encounter, dialogue, reconciliation, peace and communion.

Jesus himself proclaims, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32), illustrating the power of attraction of his love, which nothing can hinder – for he who loves us does so with the utmost of love. We might suppose that it is the light of the Resurrection being referred to here, but the Gospel tells us that there is a light from the Cross: “He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die” (John 12:33).

St. Paul reminds us that “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). St. John attributes the possibility of loving God and loving others to the very fact that God loves us by taking the initiative: “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Just as we cannot speak of the Cross without addressing the power of the Resurrection, we cannot speak of the Resurrection without addressing the power of the Cross.

The sign of the Cross invites us to centre our lives around bearing the sign of our encounter with God and with others through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In discovering the love of the Holy Trinity and the abundance of Divine Mercy, we are called to a steadfast faith which, relying on divine grace, seeks to embody both the love of God and universal love.

On this feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, may we keep our focus on Jesus Christ, who, “[...] being found in human form, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the Name that is above every name” (Philippians 2: 8,9).

In our homes, let us put up a crucifix; for gazing upon it is already a form of prayer. In our churches and our chapels, let us place a crucifix where it is easily visible; for doing so is already a way of proclaiming Jesus Christ.

To speak of the crucifix is to refer to a cross with a “corpus” (body) of the dying Jesus on it – for the resurrection does not reduce the crucifixion to a past, outdated event. On the contrary, the power of the resurrection renders the Cross an event that transcends time and space. Even today, as I stand before the cross, I stand before the love of Jesus Christ who loved me and who communicates that love to me through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

A cross without a “corpus” reminds us that He who was crucified is now the Risen One. A cross with a “corpus” reminds us that He who is now risen was the Crucified One, and that his Cross is ever-present and relevant. We need both of these types of cross.

Let us gather together in our parishes and our communities for the Way of the Cross; let us renew the tradition of the first Friday of every month; let us unite in the experience of at least a weekly exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; let us be faithful to Adoration and rediscover the need for the Lord’s Day; and let us bear witness to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, by taking part in the Mass.

As the Cross calls us to the love of God, it also calls us to community life: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34). Let us ask God for the strength to disconnect from our screens, so that they remain tools without enslaving us. In our families, let us foster a spirit of selfless love. In our parishes, let us come together: through our personal encounters with God, our communal encounters with God, and our encounters with one another. May we unify our prayer and sharing, our liturgical life and community life.

Jesus is “the Way, and the Truth, and the Life...” (John 14:6). Let us follow in his footsteps and imitate Him by making our lives a life of service, for “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life...” (Matthew 20:28). May our parishes, bearing the sign of the Cross, open their doors, pray, gather and go out to encounter others in order to build bridges, serving the dignity of every human being, and in the service of peace.

Dear People of God of the Archdiocese of Montreal, “... you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (I Peter 2:9). Through the light that streams from the Holy Cross, together let us bear witness to the Crucified and the Risen Jesus Christ, through our personal lives and our family lives, and through the life of our communities and of our parishes.

The world needs to discover God and understand more fully that He who is Goodness and Truth and Beauty “so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

May “God, who is rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4) fill you with the grace of salvation that comes to us through bearing the sign of the Cross, and through the pierced Heart of Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal